

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Polehampton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School

Kibblewhite Crescent Twyford, Berkshire RG10 9AX

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Wokingham
Date of inspection	14 March 2018
Date of last inspection	11 February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled Junior 134899
Headteacher	Penny Litson
Inspector's name and number	The Revd Dr Jason Phillips 598

School context

Polehampton Junior School is part of a hard federation of schools which includes Polehampton Church of England Infant School. This is a two-form entry junior school with 239 pupils on roll. Most pupils come from the local community. The catchment is an affluent area of Wokingham where very few pupils attract additional pupil premium funding for disadvantage. 95% of pupils are white British. There are a number of faith traditions represented in the school community including Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. The proportion of pupils with a special educational needs and/or disability is below the national average. The vicar is newly appointed.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Polehampton Junior School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian leadership of the headteacher and the diligence of governors results in a community of high expectations and the shared drive to ensure all achieve their God-given potential.
- The Christian care of staff, pupils and parents towards one another results in a Christian community where all feel they are part of the family of God and this provides a secure base from which all can flourish.
- The positive impact of religious education (RE) and collective worship on the character of this school results in pupils that are confident to explore religious, philosophical and moral questions with respect and perseverance.
- Strong active links between the school, church, diocese and the community bring mutual benefit.

Areas to improve

- Extend and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding of Anglican traditions and practices and the Church year through a wide range of creative experiences offered in worship and the curriculum.
- Develop pupils' charitable and eco-school work into active service so that they have a good understanding of social justice and environmental concerns.
- Revisit the school's vision statement with governors and staff so that they fully understand its theological underpinning in order to make and record strategic decisions that align well with the vision.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

The school continues to be outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners through its distinctive Christian character. This is because of the high expectations of the headteacher and governors that both children and staff fully achieve their God-given potential. Their determination arises from the school's vision statement that 'through inspiration, faith and love we learn, grow and succeed.' The vision frames the school hall in beautiful works of art to illustrate the vision, giving it high profile. The vision is enacted through the promotion of a two-year cycle of Christian values that includes tolerance, humility and hope, for example. The values are well embedded and a recent renewed emphasis has made them even more explicit. The active promotion of the Christian values shapes pupils' hopes and aspirations. The values result in a caring Christian community where all are included. Pupils of all faiths and none feel safe and secure and are flourishing in a climate of trust and interdependence. The Christian values inform behaviour choices and develop relationships at all levels of the school that are exemplary. Pupils, including the youngest, are able to make thoughtful moral judgements about behaviour and relationships. Due to positive relationships, bullying is rare at the school. When required, the anti-bullying policy is actioned sensitively and effectively to resolve bullying issues. This reflects best practice as detailed in the Church of England's guidance, 'Valuing All God's Children,' although this is not yet made explicit in school documentation. Attendance is above the national average because the school's Christian values inform a compassionate approach to supporting high attendance. The Christian environment establishes conditions for learning that result in progress that is at least good and attainment for most pupils that is outstanding. One parent rightly commented, 'in this school there is an aura of trust which prompts a desire to achieve.' The school's effective practice prepares pupils for the future by developing skills of empathy and a respect for diverse and multi-cultural communities. RE has a significant impact upon developing the school's core Christian values, upon pupils' multicultural understanding and developing pupils spiritually. Examples of this include studies of Jewish family life including Shabbat and Pesach, symbols within churches as well a visit to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir. However, RE does not sufficiently develop an appreciation of worldwide, multi-cultural Anglicanism limiting pupils' understanding of the diversity of Christianity. The impact of the school's quality RE teaching, supported by growth mind-set approaches to learning, results in pupils that are confident to explore religious, philosophical and moral questions with respect and perseverance. The school has a well-considered personal, social, health and moral education scheme increasingly underpinned by the Christian values that promotes spiritual development and mental wellbeing for all.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship has a central place in the life of the school and significantly influences its Christian vision and character. Pupils value the time for reflection and the way in which worship nurtures their spiritual awareness, their appreciation of the value of prayer, and their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. Prayer was a development point from the last inspection and is now a positive dimension of school life with opportunities such as year 6 prayer journeys, the use of prayer trees and class initiated prayer books having a positive impact. Collective worship engages all pupils and adults as it is regularly inspirational. It is distinctively Christian by being rooted in the biblical narrative and in Christian beliefs and teachings. It has a strong focus on the person of Jesus and is starting to develop Christian understandings of God as Trinity. Worship singing is exuberant and adds a real spiritual element to collective worship. People often refer to Polehampton Junior as the singing school, such is its impact. The celebration of principal Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter, as well as commemorating Mothering Sunday and the school's Founders Day, gives pupils some knowledge and understanding of the Christian calendar. However, awareness of the Christian calendar is not yet fully developed in worship or the curriculum. Consequently, pupils do not have sufficient appreciation of the richness of Christian festivals and saints' days or how they punctuate the seasons of the church's year. Themes for collective worship reflect the school's Christian values. Leaders desire that collective worship should effect change in attitudes, relationships and behaviour. Such an impact is clearly discernible. The themes inspire spiritual and moral reflection and are most effective in raising aspirations and

prospering the high expectations that all should strive for their best. Adults and pupils of all world faiths, and of no faith, are valued and encouraged in their spiritual journeying. They readily articulate the influence of collective worship on their lives. There are opportunities given for pupils to plan and lead collective worship, for example, year 5's self-choreographed dance for harvest worship. Pupils really value these opportunities and readily articulate they would like even more chances to lead. This demonstrates the positive impact upon them of these experiences. Collective worship is also led by a range of people; staff, pupils, local clergy and other visitors, for example, Olympic medallists. The newly appointed vicar is already making a positive impact on pupils by developing biblical thought from key Bible accounts. An example of this is the aligning of her worship experiences with the Bishop of Oxford's Lent study also being utilised by St Mary's Church. Pupils experience a variety of styles and places of worship, for example, some festivals are celebrated at the church with the federation infant school. However, the forms and styles of Anglican worship are underdeveloped, as is pupils' awareness of Anglican worship worldwide. This limits pupils' appreciation of the Christian tradition that is the foundation of the school. Each year, pupils undertake charitable endeavours to support the work of organisations such as Children in Need. The school also has a strong ecology focus through its eco-warriors. Involvement in these activities is effective in developing a sense of responsibility towards others. However, pupils' charity and eco work does not extend beyond periodic examples of compassion and localised eco work, missing opportunities for the school to be proactive in prospering social justice. Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship involves a range of stakeholders, including pupils and staff. Feedback affirms the relevance and value of collective worship and suggestions for improvement are acted upon. Of collective worship one child said, 'it helps me to be a different person each day and inspires me by other people's achievements.'

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is outstanding

The headteacher's Christian vision for the school is one, 'Where children achieve their God-given potential.' It emanates from biblical foundations and the inspiration of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie. Her commitment to make this a daily reality for all members of Polehampton Junior is an example of the difference which a Christian education can make to children and their families. This commitment to individual God-given potential extends to other members of staff and to governors. They readily speak of the support and compassion which they receive from their colleagues and is modelled by the headteacher. Governors speak confidently and with knowledge about the impact on children of initiatives which have been introduced as a direct result of the Christian vision of the school. However, an understanding of the theological underpinning of the vision by some governors is not as strong as it should be. Consequently, they do not always fully align strategic decision making to the vision. Governors are able to describe the monitoring which they have carried out, both formally and informally. As a result, they can show the impact which interventions have made and of the positive difference which the Christian values have on the life of the school. Standards in the school are high and above national averages. Where there are relative weaknesses, for example in writing, governors are effective in challenging the school to improve further. Being governors of both federation church schools, they are well placed to ensure continuity and progression for pupils. Governors are able to make difficult decisions, for example, in exploring academy status to ensure the long-term future of the school. They also ensure staff development is appropriate to secure the leadership and succession in this church school and the wider family of church schools. However, not all staff have a clear understanding of the theological underpinning of the school's vision which occasionally limits its impact on their developmental work. Governors ensure statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are clearly met. Partnerships with the local church and schools is strong bringing about mutual benefit. Parents are valued and committed partners with the school because they are encouraged to contribute, for example, in offering their views. A further example is the respectful utilisation of Jewish parents to explain the significance of Judaism in their lives to the pupils. The headteacher ensures that she and the wider school community are involved in diocesan initiatives and partnerships which will benefit both the federation and other church schools in the area. The diocesan link advisor's contribution, especially in assessing church school

expectations, is greatly valued and makes a demonstrable difference. However, the school leans heavily on that external evaluation and does not synthesis a range of evidence as fully as they might. The leadership of RE is strong and the school leadership supports the RE lead well. This leadership combination brings about high standards and effective practice in RE teaching. Decisions and actions taken over recent years have ensured that the subject has a high priority and is appropriately resourced. The headteacher's passion for education, her commitment to the school, and her understanding of the place of Christianity in the life of a community is a key driving force in the continued success of this delightful church school.

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